

July 9, 2021

Legislative Press Bureau at (401) 528-1743

THIS YEAR AT THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY

STATE HOUSE — Here are the highlights from news and events that took place in the General Assembly this year. For more information on any of these items visit <http://www.rilegislature.gov/pressrelease>



HOUSING

- The Assembly established the state's first [permanent funding stream for affordable housing](#) to help address the state's critical housing shortage.
- A new law [prohibits housing discrimination](#) against those who receive government assistance to pay their rent.
- Lawmakers launched [a five-year pilot program](#) to create permanent supportive housing for 125 chronically homeless Rhode Islanders and authorized the designation of a "[housing czar](#)" to oversee housing initiatives and develop housing plans for the state.

CHILD PROTECTION

- Legislators added [\\$10 million to the Department of Children Youth and Families'](#) budget to hire 91 new employees and help to address ongoing quality issues.
- A bill passed by the Assembly will prohibit anyone, with certain exceptions, from [bringing a firearm onto school property](#).
- Lawmakers voted to require all public school districts to adopt [suicide prevention policies](#) and train all personnel in suicide awareness and prevention annually.

ENVIRONMENT

- The 2021 [Act on Climate](#) will make the state's climate goals outlined in the Resilient Rhode Island Act of 2014 more ambitious and updated with current science, achieving net-zero emissions across all sectors by 2050.
- The General Assembly approved legislation to [cut down on disposable plastic straw use](#) in Rhode Island and [prohibited the intentional release of large groups of balloons](#).
- Lawmakers called for the development of a plan for [statewide electric vehicle charging station infrastructure](#).

More...

HEALTH

- Legislators [limited insured patients' copays for insulin](#) used to treat diabetes to \$40 for a 30-day supply.
- The General Assembly passed a law to require health insurers to cover in-network preventive [colorectal cancer screenings](#).
- The General Assembly approved legislation to expand Rhode Islanders' [access to telemedicine coverage](#).

HIGHER EDUCATION

- The Assembly made permanent the [Rhode Island Promise program](#), which provides up to two years of free tuition for eligible Rhode Islanders at Community College of Rhode Island.
- Lawmakers budgeted [an additional \\$5.9 million to assist Rhode Island College](#) with financial difficulties.
- The General Assembly granted [in-state tuition rates to all Rhode Islanders](#), regardless of immigration status, for the state's public colleges and universities.

ELEMENTARY/SECONDARY EDUCATION

- The General Assembly passed legislation concerning curriculum in [consumer education](#), [African heritage history](#), [civics](#) and [genocide and Holocaust education](#).
- The General Assembly required all public schools [to provide feminine hygiene products](#) at no cost.
- The General Assembly allowed streamlining of the English as a second language and/or English language learner [teaching certification process](#).

JUSTICE

- The General Assembly approved legislation establishing a statewide program for [police body cameras](#).
- The Assembly prohibited the purchase of a firearm on behalf of, or selling or transferring a [firearm to someone who is legally prohibited](#) from possessing one.
- The legislature passed a law to [downgrade possession of certain controlled substances](#) from a felony to a misdemeanor.

CIVIL RIGHTS

- Lawmakers made the state's law [prohibiting housing discrimination](#) more inclusive by updating the definition of sexual orientation to eliminate antiquated and offensive terms, and eliminating an exemption that effectively allows discrimination based on gender identity or expression in owner-occupied buildings of three units or less.
- The General Assembly banned the [practice of gender discrimination](#) in charging premiums for health insurance.
- The Assembly approved legislation to make [single-user restrooms in public places](#) non-gender specific.

COVID-19

- Lawmakers imposed [a moratorium on the enforcement of any municipal ordinance](#) or zoning requirement that would penalize owners of food service establishments and bars for any modifications or alternations to their premises, such as the addition of outdoor dining, in response to a declaration of emergency.

- The Assembly approved legislation to allow any Class B liquor license holders and brewpubs to continue [to sell certain amounts of beer, wine and mixed drinks](#) with a take-out food order through March 1, 2022.
- The General Assembly prohibited health insurance companies from charging copays for [COVID-related treatments](#).

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

- The General Assembly [strengthened the agreement](#) between the State of Rhode Island, IGT and Bally's Corporation.
- The General Assembly renamed the state airport in Warwick "[Rhode Island T.F. Green International Airport](#)."
- Legislators allowed for the [direct dockside sale of fish](#) to help an industry hit hard economically by the pandemic.

LABOR

- A new law will [gradually raise the minimum wage](#) in Rhode Island from \$11.50 to \$15 an hour over the next four years.
- The General Assembly approved legislation [to ensure pay equity for all employees](#), regardless of gender or ethnicity.
- The General Assembly passed legislation to [increase temporary caregiver benefits](#) over the next two years.

OPIOID CRISIS

- The General Assembly passed legislation to authorize a two-year pilot program to prevent drug overdoses through the [establishment of harm reduction centers](#), which are a community-based resource for health screening, disease prevention and recovery assistance where persons may safely consume pre-obtained substances.
- The General Assembly passed legislation to [exclude the possession of buprenorphine](#) from those controlled substances that can result in criminal penalties.
- Legislators empowered licensing bodies to issue new penalties for [irresponsible prescription practices](#).

SENIORS

- The [Nursing Home Staffing and Quality Care Act](#) establishes a minimum standard of 3.58 hours of resident care per day by Jan. 1, 2022, and 3.81 hours of resident care per day beginning Jan. 1, 2023.
- A bill approved by legislators will allow the families of [nursing home residents to be visited](#) by certain family members or caregivers even during declared emergencies.
- The legislature voted to require financial institutions to [report suspected financial exploitation of seniors](#) to the Office of Healthy Aging, and authorizing them to temporarily hold transactions they suspect as such.

QUALITY OF LIFE

- Legislators budgeted a [30-percent benefits increase for Rhode Island Works](#) recipients, the first such increase in 30 years.
- The state budget [continues the phase-out of the car excise tax](#), set to be fully eliminated after 2023.

- The General Assembly [made it easier for adopted adult children](#) and their birth parents and siblings to find each other through mutual consent.

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